




1. What similarities do you see between what happened here in Ephesus and what had happened earlier in Philippi (16:16-24)? What was different this time?
2. Paul sent two of his trusted co-workers on ahead of him to visit churches in Macedonia and Achaia. What do you think these men did there, based on what Paul had done earlier (21-22, with 18:23 and 15:36, 41)? What other project were they working on, that isn't discussed much in Acts (see 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 and 2 Corinthians 9:5)?
3. What was the base motive behind Demetrius' opposition to Paul? (24-25) What other argument did he use to try to gain support for his cause? (26-27) How do people mix these same two arguments together today for their own purposes?
4. How did the people of Ephesus respond to Demetrius' rallying cry? (28-29) Several people attempted to calm down the situation - how did each of these people try to help: Paul (30)? Asiarchs (political leaders) (31)? Alexander the Jew (33-34)? How effective were they in what they tried? How well did the crowd even understand why they were gathered together? (32)
5. How did the town clerk finally get the crowd to subside (35-41)? How did this fulfill his duty as a ruler, according to Romans 13:1-7?
6. The town clerk used the following outline to calm the crowd: (1) Appeal to common goals, (2) Minimize the perceived threat, (3) Point out legitimate options, and (4) Warn of potential consequences. How could you use this outline to help settle disputes today in your family or employment?
7. The town clerk used the phrase "undeniable facts" in verse 36. What "facts" was he talking about, and how true ("undeniable") were his facts? (35) How does this remind you of anything happening in our society today?
8. Please read Ephesians 6:10-12, which Paul wrote back to the Ephesians several years after these events took place. How do you see these principles at work in this week's passage? How do you see them at work in our society today?
9. What did Paul do before he left Ephesus (20:1)? What does this tell us about Paul's heart for the church? How might the Lord use you to do something similar in our church?



Where is God When All I See is the World?

Leader Notes for Acts 19:21-41



At this point in chapter 19, we have seen Paul being used to help build and strengthen the church in Ephesus. That church was strong and growing. Verse 20 states, “So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.” Paul next turned his attention toward completing his third missionary journey by going to Jerusalem, and then he hoped to travel to Rome. He sent Timothy and Erastus ahead of him to strengthen some churches, make preparations for meetings with him, and begin collecting an offering for the poor believers in Jerusalem.

Just as Paul was preparing to expand his gospel work to other areas, Satan inspired Demetrius, the silver smith, to try and stop him and to wreck the ministry. Ephesus was a great trade city at this time, and one of its main exports was the religion of Artemis, their goddess of the earth, love, and fertility. She was different from the Greek goddess also called Artemis and the Roman goddess Diana. This gave the Ephesians a unique market, so idol-making was a big trade in the city and a source of enormous economic profit. Demetrius gathered the tradesmen together and presented the peril of Paul preaching that gods made with hands are no gods at all. He presented the economic argument that their trade was suffering from a lack of customers, and the religious argument that the city itself would lose its prestige in the world as the primary place of worship of their goddess. No one in this crowd stopped to think, “Hey, what if Paul’s right?” Their ability to make profits and to live in a privileged Roman colony was being threatened.

After Demetrius lit the fuse, the riot was on. Filled with rage the gathered crowd began crying out, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” They said it this way so there would be no confusion with any other Artemis. They grabbed two of Paul’s companions, Gaius and Aristarchus, and rushed into the great amphitheater, which was capable of holding around 20,000 people. Paul was aware of what was happening and saw an opportunity to preach to a crowd of people. But his friends and some local officials known as Asiarchs convinced him not to walk into the theater full of people who wanted to kill him.

As typically happens with mobs and riots, the initial purpose of the gathering was lost in the confusion and competing ideas. What emerged was the idea that anyone who didn’t worship their goddess (or at least a multiplicity of gods) was the target. The Jews, who usually supported mobs when they were against Paul and the Christians, now realized that they, being monotheistic, might also be a target. To head this off, they put forward one of their own, Alexander, to speak to the crowd and let them know that the Jews were not the ones causing the trouble. The Jews wanted to turn the crowd’s attention back to Paul. But just as Alexander was starting his defense, the crowd recognized that he was a monotheistic Jew, and they didn’t want to hear from anyone who didn’t worship their idol. So they shut him down by shouting, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” for two hours. When people have weak ideas which cannot be reasonably defended, they turn to shouting and forcibly silencing dissent.

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Leader Notes for Acts 19:21-41, continued

Fortunately, human endurance and lung capacity are limited, and the town clerk was able to get their attention. The clerk's position was more like that of a mayor, and he had considerable influence. He saw the potential for the Roman government to view the situation as rebellion. The consequences would be swift and severe – anything from loss of privileges to a military takeover. He himself, among many others, would be held responsible. He then conducted a master class on crowd control and dispersion.

First, he got their attention by appealing to their pride in being Ephesians, the people entrusted with guarding the great temple and image of Artemis. (The image in her temple was of a woman covered all over with breasts, which supposedly had come down from heaven.) Second, he downplayed the perceived threat of monotheists destroying their religion by showing that nothing had actually been done to the temple or the trades. Nothing had been stolen, nor had any disrespect been shown. Having then created doubt in their cause, the clerk pointed out that the instigators, Demetrius and the tradesmen, were the ones who seemed to have a problem. This separated the crowd from the tradesmen. Third, the clerk pointed out that the tradesmen could have recourse in the courts, if indeed they had legitimate charges. That was the proper way to handle these matters.

Finally, the official warned the crowd of their Roman overlord's tendency to view rioting as rebellion. That would be more of a threat to their city than anything the monotheists could do. How could they possibly explain this to the Romans, when it was only greed from some idol makers? Now that they were quiet and thoughtful, realizing the potential danger to themselves, the clerk took the opportunity to dismiss the crowd, and they quietly went home.

Like so much of the opposition Paul faced on his journeys, there were spiritual forces working behind the scenes. Paul later told the Ephesians that our struggle is not against people, but against spiritual forces we can't see, located in the heavens. The only way to stand against these is to put on the full armor of God, with all of its spiritual weapons (Ephesians 6:10-12).

Before Paul left the city, he called together the disciples and urged them to keep following the Lord (20:1). This would be the last time he would be in Ephesus for many years. In spite of the potential dangers he faced there, he wanted to strengthen the people of the church, whom he cared so much about. May we do the same for our church, using the gifts God has given us!